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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

VIRGINIA. By ELLEN GLASGOW. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1913.

WE have said elsewhere of this book: In this great realistic novel, a woman's heart, at the mercy of a system and a tradition, reflects the entire history of a people. It is not only a personal history; it is the "new history which in its amplest meaning includes every trace and vestige of everything that man has thought and done." We have here the history which is conscious that the tiniest stirrings of emotion, the surprises, the set convictions of the obscurest individual are a legitimate part of the structure of life and go to the making of a civilization. As Arnold Bennett has immortalized the "Five Towns," so Ellen Glasgow has caught and set in lasting mold the civilization of a certain period in Virginia.

A great realistic novel; this phrase gives the key-note to any criticism that can be made of *Virginia*. "Great fiction," its author says elsewhere, "is neither more nor less than great truth-telling." To hold up the mirror of life, to see the figures there reflected without distorting glamour, or subjective breathings, and then to give honest report of what is seen; this is to be the great writer of fiction.

The state of Virginia, so long a picturesque survival into a new age, has suffered no little from the sentimental tenderness of her historians. It is human, probably, to regard the past through a softening haze that blurs outlines and modifies ugliness. It is the greatest of Miss Glasgow's achievements that she has always been able to see with precision, and the value of her novels lies in their untrammelled sincerity. She knows her own land from beginning to end; she has watched its development; she has noted those who are at ease in their environment, those who have rebelled and by rebellion made the entering-wedge for progress. Virginia, in this case, however, is not the name of a country, but of a woman; a typical woman of her locality and her time, the early eighties. She is a woman who has never questioned the traditions in which she was bred and whose reading and experiences have given her no glimpses into a wider or more varied life. Virginia is beautiful, gentle, self-sacrificing. She felt ardently, but she neither thought nor read. Indeed, it was a part of the very tradition in which she was reared that reading was a luxury for the idle, only to be indulged in as one would in dancing. Education was not so much a mental preparation for ac-

quiring an understanding of life as a moral training for self-sacrifice; for this, according to tradition, was the sole object of a woman's life. Before marriage, beauty and joyousness and freedom from care were but the duteous means of attracting a husband, but after marriage one became a slave to that convention which regards the continuance of life as its sole object. Not that life should gain in value and worth, but that it should go on, was the objective-point of woman's creation; and to this theory Virginia devoted herself instinctively.

"Your first duty now," was her mother's parting admonition to her after her marriage, "is to your husband. His will must be yours now, and wherever your ideas cross, it is your duty to give up, darling. It is the woman's part to sacrifice herself." And so with outworn traditions, sheltered by a fallacious view of life, Virginia falls in love, marries, bears children, suffers the pangs and knows the rewards of motherhood, and learns that the fruits of renunciation are more renunciations. She flings away her youth, her beauty, her part in the outside world in the service of wifedom and motherhood, only to find in the end that the world has moved on without her; that as she gave up, others fulfilled their lives and that fate demands more of us than mere renunciation. It demands the will-to-live, to create, to add to the fullness of consciousness and being.

If the first book in this novel is idyllic, the last one is poignantly and unrelentingly austere. The great chapter in the first book is "White Magic," a chapter which in poetic loveliness may be set beside the famous nineteenth chapter of *Richard Fernal*. The great chapter in the end is "Bitterness." With the truth of the historian and psychologist, to whom nothing so much matters as fact, Ellen Glasgow preserves a complete fidelity to life. What was lovely and exquisite in her heroine remains so to the last. Virginia trained in gentleness and self-restraint retains these virtues to the last. She accepts, almost unconsciously, the slow withdrawal of personalities that comes between her husband and herself without recriminations or scenes or quarrels, but only with the slowly divergent interests, till there is nothing of soul that one can give the other; so that when the physical bond is broken the partners wake suddenly to find that nothing is left.

It is a profound tragedy that Miss Glasgow depicts, and in these days, when traditions are breaking up and ties are loosening, her tale carries a fine moral.

The English of this book is faithful to the coloring of the author's spirit. Unforced and unadorned except where the subject is of itself poetic, it is throughout of a classic purity. There is not a trace of the modern mixing up of the parts of speech, or of modish defacements of the language. As far as language goes it might have been written in the days of Addison himself.

Indeed from many points of view, Ellen Glasgow's work bears the imprint of permanency. She has never courted public favor; she has never written a "best-seller" for applause or money; but like Hardy, like Meredith, like John Galsworthy, she does the work to the highest reach of her capacity and leaves the results to Life. But her books are more likely than any other American novels of this day to find a place on the ultimate and permanent shelves of literature.